

Poet and translator at the edge of contemporaneity  
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In speaking about the edge of language, i.e. that point where language is questioning its own borders and possibilities, we ought to keep in mind that poetic language generally reveals itself in the shape of linear historical duration, or in the form of abrupt rupture, yawning or chasm. Let's look more intently at these two spatial-temporal models of poetic language, and, simultaneously, at their cultural revisions in contemporary poetry practice.

The first model presupposes that poetic language is embedded in the non-continuous historical progression or evolution and thus appears as part of the ceaseless historical process, where the forthcoming of apocalyptical catastrophe is eternally postponed, though unavoidable. If the poetic language is shaped as History itself, either as the profane discrete sequence or as a sacral mythological continuum, then History might be depicted as the implementation of poetic language. Poetic language adherent to the ideology of Enlightenment, the aesthetics of Romanticism, or the values of the modernist movement would manifest itself in the guise of sublime or banal, fictitious or feasible historical narration. The act of translating such historicized poetic language means the relocation of historical narratives from one national context into another, the displacement and shifting of whole systems of symbolic and cultural allusions.

The second model assumes the reduction of the poetic utterance to a pause in the consistent historical development. The decisive catastrophic event has been broken out of the past and the apocalyptical disaster with its revolutionary pathos has swept out the remnants of the previous symbolic order. In this model the origin of poetic speech could be discerned, not in elevated romantic self-fashioning or excessive modernist self-searching but in avant-garde meticulous self-erasure of the poet and irrevocable self-oblivion of his own cultural genesis. That radically experimental poetic language tends to demarcate the insurmountable breach in the historical process, the breach which sustains the breakthrough of the new utopian subjectivity, the breach which is charged with 'here-and-now' (Jetztzeit), as Walter Benjamin pointed out in his 'On the Concept of History'. To translate this ruptured kind of poetic language attempts to achieve the same imposing effect of linguistic self-devastation in other cultural situations.

During the postmodernist époque the accomplished status of both these models was significantly revised, or even dethroned. In postmodern writing they played the amusing role of the ironic pastiche or mosaic bricolage. However, by putting all highly esteemed cultural models in the situation of a post-historic muddle, postmodernism also undertook the comprehensive denunciation of the insatiable will to the ideological power intrinsic to those cultural models. Translation of postmodern poetry implies not only replication of the whole linguistic complexity of the original but also, in fact, mainly, the repetition of the critical methods carried out by the translated text. Therefore the postmodern lyric is easily yielding – and inimically withstanding – to translation because postmodernism put under radical question the possibility of such translation.

Practical and conceptual aspects of my work as a poet collaborating with translators are built on the premise that my poetry is predominantly post-postmodern. This model of lyrical expression not only rejects postmodernism but also tends to re-actualize the modernist values. Also, it speaks about the present world on the language of contemporaneity itself. Kevin M.F. Platt, professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Pennsylvania and translator of my work, points out that 'Golyenko's current writing may be seen as a diagnostic procedure applied to contemporary social and political reality'. But what does it mean for poetry language to be fully contemporary, to be absolutely present, to be placed in today? The language of today should provide the reader with, at first, concrete information about the contemporary world, second, the emotional reaction, collective or individual, to this information, and third, reflexive judgment as to how to grasp this information. In my poem 'Looking at the Around' the information about the terrorist attack of a suicide bomber triggers an immediate emotional reaction which results in the reflexive activity of the language itself. What is really challenging to the translator of 'the poetry of today' is to preserve the correspondence between informational, emotional and reflexive levels attained in the original. The emotional response and reflexive reaction to breaking news in one cultural context would be significantly different than in another. The task of the translator here is to find the adequate equivalence to the motley multiplicity of emotional and ethical conditions (for example, tediousness and pointlessness provoked by mass-media activities) which are unavoidable in one language but could be easily missed in the other. Thus the translator of contemporary, socially and politically engaged poetry will need to preserve in the other language the same informative,

emotional and reflexive capacities that were disclosed in the original; in other words, to achieve the same disturbing effect of involvement in the troubled and agitated today.